

Natural Right and Global Public Authority

A Contribution to a Colloquium on Lonergan's Economics and the Global Financial Crisis
Marquette University, March 1, 2013

Darrell Dobbs, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science
Marquette University

My task is to comment on Fr. Michael Czerny's paper, "The International Monetary and Financial Systems: Who is Moving Any Reform?" I am told on good authority that Fr. Czerny served as a principal architect of the *Note* titled "Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority," which was issued a little over a year ago by the Vatican's Pontifical Council on Peace and Justice, and in explanation of which Fr. Czerny's present paper is being offered.

Fr. Czerny opens his paper with an approving allusion to Lonergan's conception of the common good. "Lonergan," he says, "well reminds us that the common good is both intrinsically and dynamically universalizing." From this he goes on, like the Council, to promote global public authority as a necessary modality for universalizing the common good. In my response, I, too, shall adopt some elements of Lonergan's analytic framework. I hope, by doing so, to uncover a principled basis upon which an objective appraisal of Fr. Czerny's paper and the Council's *Note* may be formulated.

First, however, I'd like to explain why I accepted Fr. Doran's invitation to participate in this colloquium. To put it plainly, I do not believe that the Church's teaching on the question of global public authority is settled. If it is not, then it may still be possible to contribute in some small way to the sound development of this teaching. Such efforts will be met with skepticism, of course. Fr. Czerny and many others believe that the Church has spoken decisively in favor of the necessity of a true world political authority. There is much to commend their view. So, please allow me to share some reasons for my dissent.

It would appear that the magisterial authority of papal pronouncement indeed supports Fr. Czerny's call for a global public authority. Fr. Czerny correctly cites Pope Benedict XVI (*Caritas in Veritate*, 67), who in turn cites Pope John XXIII concerning what Benedict represents as an urgent need for a "true world political authority." But a careful reading of section 67 reveals that Benedict speaks initially, and in his own voice, subjectively of "a strongly felt need...for a reform...so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth," which, he says, "seems necessary" in view of world problems. His subsequent, objective declaration that "there is urgent need of a true world political authority..." is stunning, to be sure. But here Benedict is not so much speaking in his own voice as *echoing* another's. "...there is urgent need of a true world political authority," he says, "as my predecessor Blessed John XXIII indicated some years ago." We are thus directed by Benedict himself to John's *Pacem in Terris* as the most forceful statement of Catholic social teaching on the question of global public authority. But what I find, upon turning to *Pacem in Terris*, is not particularly forceful at all.

Let us examine the relevant sections of *Pacem in Terris*. Take first the precise wording of John's formulation. He observes that world problems call for "a public authority with a world-wide sphere of activity" (137). He does not say a *global* public authority. In fact, the phrases "global public authority" or "true world political authority" do not appear anywhere in *Pacem in Terris*. The public authority required to address global problems could very well be the public authority of a single state or of several states acting in concert, provided only that it or they move with a "world-wide sphere of activity." Certainly, the Bretton Woods Conference, which brought into existence the IMF, the World Bank, and GATT, is a clear example of public authorities of several states acting in concert, for better or for worse, with a "world-wide sphere of activity." The Marshall and MacArthur Plans, adopted *unilaterally* by the United States, could well count as examples of the public authority of a single state acting with a "world-wide sphere of activity." These are significant counterexamples to any expectation that only a *global* public authority would be competent to address problems relating to international trade and finance. In view of these examples, it was wise of Pope John to *leave unspecified* the exact location of the public authority needed to address world problems. But this lack of specificity means that Catholic social teaching is not settled in favor of *global* political authority.

Consider also the tone of John's formulation. He draws his consideration of world problems and public authority to a close in section 145. This is where we find his reference to the one institution that could be currently regarded as an incipient global public authority, namely the United Nations. He offers genuine support for the further adaptation and growth of the U.N., but this support is clearly personal, not magisterial. He sums up by saying that "It is therefore Our earnest wish" that the United Nations progressively adapt to become proportionate to the magnitude of world problems.

It is his *wish*? This statement, like Benedict's in his own voice, is subjective and personal, not magisterial. One does not have to search far to find what a genuinely magisterial statement looks like. Simply reading ahead to section 153 in *Pacem in Terris*, we find John addressing the question of education. Pursuing the same common good of integral human development that is his concern throughout the encyclical, His Holiness notes that "Scientific training reaches a very high level, whereas religious training generally does not advance beyond the elementary stage. It is essential, therefore, that the instruction given to our young people be complete and continuous..."

These two statements, formulated by the same pontiff in the same work and signaled in each case by the conclusive word "therefore," provide a perfect opportunity to make a telling comparison. Regarding progressive adaptation of the United Nations, Pope John reports that he is personally wishful. Regarding the promotion of Catholic education, he does not simply report his wish; *he identifies and teaches what is objectively essential*. That, I submit to your consideration, is the form in which settled Catholic social teaching is expressed.

I maintain, accordingly, that Catholic social teaching on the question of global public authority is presently unsettled, and, truly, stands in need of further assistance from theologians, philosophers and economists. What can we do to help?

I shall take my bearings from one of Lonergan's few papers that can be properly classified as political philosophy. The paper is "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness." Even here,

Lonergan is systematic and synoptic, rather than concrete or detailed. But his analytical framework is compelling.

First, let us review that framework. Lonergan maintains that it is necessary “so to develop the notion of natural right as to make it no less relevant to human historicity than it is to human nature” (*A Third Collection*, p.169). Human nature, and so natural right, is constant, he says, while human historicity is variable. There are, however, particularly illuminating moments in history, when what man makes of man is itself indicative of the truth and meaning of natural right. Consideration of these historical moments also fits into a more comprehensive frame of inquiry. In this inquiry, “questions are of three basic kinds, questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, and questions for deliberation.” Questions of intelligence, Lonergan explains, are answered with adequate statements of *principle*. Questions of reflection concern the *sufficiency of reason or of evidence*. And questions of deliberation challenge whether something is *worthwhile* (*A Third Collection*, pp.172-3).

With this framework in mind, let us turn to Fr. Czerny’s paper. Fr. Czerny correctly says that the common good is intrinsically and dynamically universal. But in the very interest of promoting this dynamism, we must ask, by what modality is it to be made universal? Fr. Czerny maintains, and holds that Catholic social teaching instructs, that the modality of dynamism *necessarily* includes a Global Public Authority. His reasons for drawing this conclusion are based, in my opinion, on dubious extensions of technical conclusions in the theory of welfare economics. It is tempting to address the problems with that reasoning directly. But such an exercise will at best yield reasons of a contingent and prudential nature for opposing the institution of a true world political authority. Fr. Czerny and other advocates of a world political authority will deflect such findings by pointing out that their plans can and should be pursued incrementally, with due respect to prudence and to the principle of subsidiarity. So, I intend to take a different tack. I shall follow Lonergan’s suggestion and consult the encounter between natural right and human historicity. Reflection upon this encounter will disclose a crucial principle of right, upon which may be based a more nearly absolute opposition to world political authority as a modality of pursuing the universal common good.

Throughout the course of human history, mankind has suffered the sway of political authorities established by accident and force. Occasionally, a particular ruler might pay heed to the common good, but this was exceptional. Even when rulers did concern themselves with the common good, there was no assurance that they would do so again tomorrow. But one moment stands out in which a reasoned, intergenerational commitment to the true principles of natural right was achieved, when political authority, for once, was to be established by reflection and choice. The moment occurred in the summer of 1776, in the American city providentially named in honor of the theological virtue of Brotherly Love.

So what can the American Declaration of Independence, particularly in its historicity, teach us about the modality properly suited to the pursuit of the common good?

Let us consider the philosophical statement of natural right on its own, that famous argument of self-evidence, namely: the observation that whoever knows *Man* knows also that such an entity could only have been created, and by virtue of the form in which it was created is endowed with certain inalienable rights, among which the most worthy of mention are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In accordance with the essence-referring intention of all arguments from self-evidence, we can infer that Jefferson and his associates intended by means of this argument to maintain that *all human beings* are endowed with these rights. That much is certain. But it is just as important to note that these rights are *insecure*, as the collective experience of the human race amply demonstrates. The American Declaration of Independence consequently points out that governments -- public authorities, if you like -- are established among men precisely to secure these otherwise insecure rights, and that the establishment of such public authorities requires and remains contingent upon the consent of the governed. Now, all this is presented by way of philosophical argumentation.

So what about the historicity of this philosophical declaration? What will considering the Declaration in light of the historical moment in which it is formulated add to our understanding? This, remember, is Lonergan's challenge.

The Declaration of Independence points to its own historicity explicitly in its opening sentence. It reads, “When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the ... station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to the separation.” What is most noteworthy for our present purpose is that this proposition distinguishes an *American* people as a *different* people from the British people. How did this come about? Evidently, circumstances of considerable moral and spiritual significance, such as intermarriage, shared hardship, recourse to the same God in that hardship, common language and culture, geographical isolation and even alienation from centers of previous allegiance, commercial interdependence, and not least of all the visionary encouragement of political entrepreneurs like Thomas Jefferson, all conspired to forge the human beings participating in these influences into a nascent people who could now, in this time and place, self-consciously identify as *Americans*. According to the Declaration, it is this *people* that “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” entitle to an independent political station, if it should so consent.

It is a *people*, then, not simply any random assortment of individuals, whom the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle to institute public authority. The spiritual, moral, and material forging of a people must precede the institution of public authority as a modality for pursuing the common good. Subject to existing law, any set of individuals can of course appoint a private security team to defend its rights. But these security teams are employees, not public authorities. Their appointment exemplifies the fact that pursuit of the common good is surely not *limited* to the modality of public authority. That must never be forgotten. But the public or political pursuit of this good -- *which always entails a legitimate monopoly on the use of force* -- presupposes the existence of an historically emergent and self-conscious people, and not merely some random set of signatories, as its agent.

Now, this principle suggests a question that we must pose to Fr. Czerny and to the members of the Council for Justice and Peace. Let us, of course, grant that the process called globalization entails significant national interdependence in matters of trade and finance, as well as significant human vulnerabilities that go along with that interdependence. But the question remains: Is there

any evidence that this economic interdependence has brought into existence a global people, who, as a principle of natural right, *must* be the agent of any global public authority?

I can find no evidence, either inside or outside Fr. Czerny's paper, of the existence of any such people. There is, as yet, no "Terran" people in the valorized sense I have elicited from my reading of the Declaration of Independence. Anyone is free to use the term "people" as a synonym for the human race, but that usage does not reflect what we have just learned.

The common good, as Fr. Czerny says, is intrinsically and dynamically directed toward universal humanity. But I have argued that only an historically situated and expressly self-conscious people can be the agent of the *political* expression of this dynamism. Increased interdependence in economic trade is admittedly an important step in forging such a people on a global scale. But it is a step -- no more and no less. Measured against the principle of the indispensability of a people as the agent of institution of public authority, I am compelled to conclude that Fr. Czerny and the Council have not achieved the "sufficiency of reason or of evidence" required in Lonergan's second point of inquiry.

If this is correct, then the answer to Lonergan's third question, "is it worth it?" is obvious. Fr. Czerny's and the Council's call for the institution of global public authority is, at best, premature. The Council's proposal is worthwhile, perhaps, as something to keep in mind as a future possibility, like cold fusion. But by no means is it a present imperative.

Therefore, I conclude that in the present and in all foreseeable circumstances, the establishment of a global public authority is not only inadvisable; it would be a violation of natural right.

Naturally, I join Fr. Czerny in sympathy for the victims of this financial crisis. I also agree with much of his Monday morning quarterbacking concerning policies that might have attenuated this crisis (pp.11-13). But let us not forget that all these policies were available to the U.S. and to other local public authorities before the onset of the crisis. The crisis occurred, not for lack of a global public authority, but for precisely the reason that *most* economic and political disasters occur: namely, because of failures of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and

responsibility in the very people charged with the task of keeping human greed and envy in check. In other words, it occurred because of the intellectual and moral failures of our political leaders.

What mad hope is it, then, that drives the members of the Pontifical Council on Peace and Justice to endorse reforms that, even if adopted incrementally, would only place more power and grant more scope of operation to this same class of men?

I wonder if somewhere in the voluminous writings of Bernard Lonergan there is sufficient psychological insight to provide an accurate diagnosis and a suitable remedy for this madness. To provide that remedy would be a great benefit to the Church and to the universal common good of mankind.